

Start Strong Council Meeting

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Dr. Thomas R. Morris, Secretary of Education, called the meeting to order at 10 a.m. *Council members present at the meeting included:*

Ms. Deborah Battle, pre-kindergarten teacher, City of Norfolk Public Schools; Ms. Katherine Busser, Vice President, Capital One; Ms. Elizabeth Cranwell, co-founder and teacher, New Vista Montessori School, Roanoke; Ms. Renee Dino, Early Childhood Ed. Supervisor, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools; Mr. Michael Harreld, president, PNC Bank, Greater Washington Region; The Honorable Karen Hodock, member, Bland County Board of Supervisors; Ms. Kimberly Hundley, kindergarten teacher, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools; Dr. Suzanne Clark Johnson, president, Voices for Virginia's Children; Ms. Patricia Kluge, chairwoman, Kluge Estate Winery and Vineyard; The Honorable Rob Krupkicka, member, Alexandria City Council; Ms. Iris Leguizamo, center director, NOVA Child Development Center; The Honorable Mamie Locke, member, Senate of Virginia; The Honorable Kenneth Plum, member, House of Delegates; Dr. Dwight Riddick, senior pastor, Gethsemane Baptist Church, Newport News; Dr. Jeanne Roper, vice president/past president, Valley Interfaith Child Care Center, Blacksburg; Ms. Judith Rosen, director, Fairfax County Office for Children; Mr. Walter Rugaber, retired president and publisher, The Roanoke Times, and former Interim President, Hollins University; The Honorable Robert Tata, member, House of Delegates; Mr. Stephen Troxell, director, Shenandoah Valley Head Start Program

Council members not able to attend included:

The Honorable John H. Chichester, member, Senate of Virginia; Mr. Robert Henry Dugger, III, managing director, Tudor Investment Corporation; Mr. Gordon Gentry, CEO, Harbor Bank, Newport News; The Honorable Phillip Hamilton, member, House of Delegates; Dr. Stephen C. Jones, superintendent, City of Norfolk Public Schools; Ms. Allison Weinstein, president and chief operating officer, Weinstein Properties, Richmond

Others in attendance:

Governor Timothy M. Kaine; Ms. Ashley Adams, Skyline Community Action Program; Dr. Mavis Brown, Professor University of Richmond; Ms. Jean Bankos, Senior Advisor to the Governor on Educational Projects; Ms. Vanessa Burns, Kindergarten teacher, Tappahanock Public Schools; Dr. Dean Clifford, Facilitator; Ms. Elizabeth Crawford, 2006 Governor's Fellow; Dr. Sue Davis, Superintendent, Danville Public Schools; Ms. Eileen Filler-Corn, Senior Advisor to the Governor for State-Federal Relations; Ms. Kim Frye Smith, Executive Director, Skyline Community Action Program, Inc.; Mr. Doug Garcia, Assistant Secretary of Education; Ms. Kathy Glazer, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, Department of Social Services; Ms. Linda Gross, Skyline Community Action Program; Secretary Katherine Hanley, Secretary of the Commonwealth; Ms. Judy Heiman, Deputy Secretary of Education; Ms. Joyce Finnerty Lewis, Specialist in Early Childhood Development, UVA Richmond Center; Ms. Mary P. Minor, Director, Child and Family Connection; Mr. Ethan McWilliams, Intern, Secretary of Education's Office; Ms. Jennie Moline, Special Assistant to the Governor; Dr. Thomas R. Morris, Secretary of Education; Ms. Princess Moss, President Virginia Education Association; Ms. Helen O'Beirne, 2006 Governor's Fellow; Ms. Yvonne Rose, Legislative Aide to Delegate Tyler; Ms. Eleanor Saslaw, Member, State Board of Education; Dr. Tom Shortt, Executive Director, Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals; Mr. Christopher Spanos, Government and Public Affairs Counselor, VA Association for Early Childhood Education; Ms. Cheryl Strobel, Specialist, Early Childhood, Virginia Department of Education; Ms. Karen Sweeney, Education and training Services Director, Memorial Child Guidance Clinic; Ms. Lisa Thomas, Executive Director, Child Development Resources; Ms. Kendall Tyree, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Education

Dr. Thomas R. Morris, Secretary of Education, welcomed council members and introduced **Governor Timothy M. Kaine**.

Governor Kaine thanked council members for their service. He emphasized the importance of early education, singling out proficiency in reading by the third grade as a key indicator. He noted that of the roughly 100,000 children who took the 3rd grade reading SOL last year, 26,000 did not achieve proficiency. If a child passes the 3rd grade reading SOL test, he or she has a 95% of passing the 5th grade test; however, failing the 3rd grade SOL test correlates with a 50% chance of failing the exam in 5th grade. Reading mastery also correlates with graduation rates, retention rates, and success later in life. The Governor stated his goal to reduce the number of children failing the 3rd grade reading SOL by the end of academic year 2009-2010 to 10,000. The Governor noted that last year, 10,000 3rd graders were retained at the cost of about \$70-to-\$80 million dollars. This is nearly double the amount currently spent on the Virginia Preschool Initiative. The Governor argued that it would be best to spend money providing children with a stronger foundation earlier in life than later for retention. Citing a proverb, he remarked that it is “easier to build a child than to repair a man.”

Governor Kaine acknowledged that the funds required for universal, voluntary preschool education in Virginia are substantial. He said his goal is to build public-private partnerships in order to ensure high-quality preschool programs, strengthening and building upon structures currently in place. Governor Kaine closed with an expression of appreciation for the council members’ service, and urged them to serve with an open mind. He requested an initial report with preliminary recommendations for the mid-biennium budget he will write this fall by October, 2006.

Swearing-in Ceremony

Secretary Katherine Hanley led the swearing-in ceremony.

Secretary Morris welcomed the council members and emphasized the importance of their work. He reiterated that input from across the state is encouraged. Workgroups/task forces will include both council members and other interested persons, thereby permitting additional stakeholders to participate in discussions. Secretary Morris reminded members that the governor requests initial recommendations by mid-October. He would like strong local infrastructure in place and requests the Council’s views on how to best accomplish this goal.

Secretary Morris introduced **Dr. Dean Clifford** who then facilitated the day’s agenda. **Dr. Clifford** provided an overview of the members’ materials, including the executive order establishing the Start Strong Council, and reviewed the process and timeline envisioned for the council’s initial work. This was followed by introductions from each council member.

Dr. Clifford reviewed some of the questions to be addressed by the council, including:

- ✓ How do we improve the quality and expand the availability of pre-kindergarten?
- ✓ Will military families be included?
- ✓ How will language background be considered?
- ✓ How does the council propose using existing sites?
- ✓ How will funding be provided?
- ✓ What advocacy strategies are recommended?
- ✓ How will the success of a program be measured? (We do not want to advocate testing 4-year-olds).
- ✓ How do we rate quality?

Dr. Clifford further emphasized that family support services are essential. Children learn best in the context of relationships. The most influential person(s) in a child's life is his or her parent(s). Dr. Clifford explained the success of North Carolina's "More at 4" parent education program. She provided a brief overview of the status of preschool programs across the United States. Currently, 41 out of 50 states have a preschool plan in place. Based on data from business leaders, employers cannot train students on three skills: 1) critical thinking; 2) communication (both written and oral); and 3) collaboration. Dr. Clifford explained that these skills are founded in early childhood education.

Dr. Clifford also emphasized the importance of nutrition and a nurturing, stable environment. Research data indicate that children who have not been nurtured have brains that are 20-30% smaller than those that have. 80-85% of brain development occurs in the first 5 years. If children start behind in kindergarten, most remain behind later in life. Several factors impact children's school readiness, including parents' educational background. If a parent has not graduated from high school, for example, his or her child is six times more likely than other children to also not graduate.

There are five domains of school readiness which must be addressed to ensure preparedness. These include: Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development, Cognitive Development, Language Development, and Physical Development. Those most likely to arrive at school not ready are boys, minority children, children living in families with low resources, children living in educationally disadvantaged homes, children living in single parent homes, and children living in troubled neighborhoods.

During lunch, **Ms. Kathy Glazer** gave a report on current developments in early childhood services in Virginia. *Smart Beginnings* represents a holistic approach to early childhood education from birth to age five. She highlighted the Governor's Partnership Grants, with three models are currently in place. To date, 15 localities have applied for grants to participate in this initiative. These programs may serve as good models for the local councils envisioned by the Governor. The newly created Virginia Early Childhood Foundation will facilitate the dissemination of grants.

Ms. Glazer provided a brief overview of the alignment project in which early learning guidelines from birth to age 5 are being developed. The project seeks to align standards, assessments and professional development for early education. Quality rating standards are a vital component of this project; we must determine how "high quality" will be judged. Another group, the Head Start Collaborative Advisory Committee, is working on ways to improve collaboration among Head Start, VPI and other service providers. There is a \$16 million pledge from the regional Head Start office to fund a pilot for blending Head Start and VPI classrooms.

Dr. Clifford provided an overview of comprehensive initiatives, referenced on page 25 of the agenda's supporting documents. Comprehensive work entails collaborating with other systems such as health care, and addressing economic and environmental factors.

Council members then divided into small groups to discuss the question *How should pre-kindergarten be positioned to relate well to the values and interests of Virginians?*

Dr. Clifford explained the benefits of top-down, bottom-up approaches. Grassroots approaches are great mechanisms for advocacy. North Carolina's *Smart Start* program, for example, was saved by the bottom-up, local-level approach. The top is then the visible champion of the program.

Council members divided into groups of four to discuss the prompt *How would you state your vision for pre-kindergarten in Virginia?* Afterwards, they listed their values and/or value statements that they

believe should guide the design of Virginia's pre-kindergarten program. Vision statements as well as a list of values developed by the group were turned in to discuss at future meetings.

Deputy Secretary Judy Heiman (1:20) then presented on the **expansion of pre-kindergarten in the U.S.** She first provided an overview of the percentage of 4-year-olds served through state funded preschool, as well as the status of preschool in a few select states. Ms. Heiman explained that growth has been rapid over the last four years, with current state legislatures generally calling for increases in preschool funding. She then addressed the recent events in California concerning the "Preschool for All" initiative. She noted that it was largely opposed due to its "soak the rich" taxing approach. Lessons for Virginia during the development of our preschool initiative include building support, infrastructure, and confidence, expanding incrementally, and developing a rational funding mechanism.

Ms. Heiman noted potential sources of funds Virginia could consider (e.g., general revenues, school funding formula, lottery proceeds, tobacco settlements, excise and sin taxes, dedicated proportion of income tax, and federal funds). She further addressed how different states measure quality. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has developed ten criteria we could consider during the development of quality measures. Finally, she noted how different states perform under the NIEER criteria. The positive elements of Virginia's preschool system include the requirement of some specialized training; a maximum class size set at 20, a minimum staff-child ratio is 1:10, and the existence of screening and referral for vision, hearing, health, and support. Among its areas of weakness, the system is not comprehensive, a bachelor's degree is required for public schools only, a CDA is not required for teacher assistants, in-service requirements are determined locally, the provision of meals is dependent upon day length, and there is currently no system of state monitoring.

Identifying a vision and the values to guide the pre-kindergarten program - Council members divided into groups to identify a vision and their values to guide the pre-kindergarten program. Groups reported as follows:

Group #1: Vision—high quality aligned with SOLs; special needs; community involvement—public and private; staff development; Values—achievement gap; more accreditation

Group #2: Vision—parents central; public/private input; Values—healthy, happy human beings; local match; local input; culturally responsive; reduce barriers to access

Group #3: Vision—public/private partnership; parents and communities involved; Values: global standards; starts at prenatal; solves for housing, hunger turnkey; inspirational; economically available; paradigm shift; parental involvement; community

Group #4: Vision—serve every family and child everywhere; high quality definition; Values—professional development and align with whole or ½ day childcare

Group #5: Vision—available to all 3-year-olds; Values—high quality; significant outcomes; all are valued; program is cost-effective; see tangible return on investment; benefits for staff

Next Steps

Dr. Clifford recommended that council members review current pre-kindergarten services and related programs in Virginia, as well as models of pre-kindergarten from other states.

Task forces were recommended for specific areas, including:

- ✓ program standards

- ✓ professional development
- ✓ site selection
- ✓ governance/coordination
- ✓ marketing
- ✓ evaluation

Secretary Morris reviewed the Governor's request for an initial report by mid-October, 2006. He requested that members think further about the development of task forces; and if anyone has information or interests in task force development, please contact Secretary Morris. Members and other interested parties will be put on a mailing list to facilitate communication.

In the near future, six regional meeting on the alignment project will be held. The council can "piggyback" on these meetings to solicit public input about the expansion of pre-kindergarten.

Finally, **Secretary Morris** thanked members for their commitment to this important initiative.

Adjournment (3:00 p.m.)

The next meeting is scheduled for July 19, 2006 from 10-3 at the same location, Capital One at West Creek.